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Letter dated 1 June 2004 from the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that under the presidency of the Republic of the Philippines, the Security Council is scheduled to have a debate on the subject "the role of civil society in post-conflict peace-building" on Tuesday, 22 June 2004.

The presidency has prepared the attached non-paper to help guide the discussion on this subject (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Lauro L. **Baja** Jr.
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 1 June 2004 from the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The role of civil society in post-conflict peace-building

Conflict prevention and post-conflict peace-building require a comprehensive and multidimensional approach. Any successful action on the matter depends largely on the active cooperation and broadest participation of the international community. The United Nations, Governments and international and regional organizations have always been at the forefront of these efforts.

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in this endeavour. Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations recognizes the contributions that civil society can make in achieving the goals of the Organization. In its resolution 57/337, the General Assembly recognizes the important supporting role of civil society and invites it to continue to contribute to efforts to prevent armed conflict and reconciliation. The Assembly also encourages civil society to pursue practices that foster a climate of peace, help to prevent or mitigate crisis situations and contribute to reconciliation.

In the Security Council, interaction with civil society increased in the 1990s as a result of changes brought about by the end of the cold war and the influence of increasing globalization. The Gulf War in 1991, the Somalia crisis in 1993, the Rwandan genocide in 1994, as well as the Bosnia and Herzegovina situation, the Palestinian crisis and the conflicts in Central and Western Africa, were salient international crises that galvanized Security Council-civil society interaction. Civil society organizations also monitored the Council's work in the areas of sanctions, peacekeeping, election monitoring, policing and post-conflict peace-building. They were also present in feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, sheltering the homeless and protecting the vulnerable in many crisis areas, including civil wars. In many of these instances, civil society has played important roles in the mobilization and utilization of resources, as well as the delivery of assistance in post-conflict reconstruction.

The involvement of civil society groups in these events has provided them with the opportunity to assume a larger role in international affairs and greater influence in shaping public opinion on international policy issues. Many civil society organizations remain active on the ground in many crisis areas, even after the United Nations and government agencies have left the scene. As a result, civil society has gained a high institutional reputation and has maintained wide public support.

Aside from their contributions to peacekeeping, relief and humanitarian efforts, civil society organizations are also a source of information on the ground. By their sheer number, dedicated membership and unique advocacy roles, civil society organizations have become a force to reckon with in post-conflict areas. Their public advocacy role and media campaigns often help to shape public understanding of the crises and bring pressure to bear on Governments to act. Thus, civil society has become an actor in the policy process that cannot be ignored and whose goodwill and support have proved useful and, at times, even essential to the success of government policies and Council initiatives.

But much more needs to be done to harness civil society in both the structural (strategies to address the root causes) and the operational (strategies in the face of crisis) dimensions of post-conflict peace-building. The different ways by which civil society can contribute to resource mobilization and the maintenance of peace should be explored and discussed in greater depth.

Since post-conflict situations vary, it is important to have strategies for developing a coherent approach to effective post-conflict peace-building that involves civil society actors. Mechanisms for Government and civil society sharing and cooperation must be put in place and made easily accessible in the most crucial stages of efforts at peace-building. An essential element to ensure the successful engagement of civil society is the promotion of healthy government and non-government cooperation. For instance, some members of civil society tend to be viewed with more suspicion than trust, whose activities are sometimes regarded as inimical to governmental programmes. This can be an obstacle to fostering interactive partnership that could be helpful in preventing conflict and expediting the process of post-conflict peace-building. Confidence-building measures and opportunities for dialogue help in addressing challenges of this kind.

Questions:

- How can the Security Council maximize the contribution of civil society in post-conflict peace-building efforts? What essential elements will be needed to ensure smooth governmental/intergovernmental and civil society interaction in post-conflict areas?
- How can civil society organizations assist the Security Council in assessing the needs of the country (e.g., needs assessment survey) as the latter embarks on the road to post-conflict peace-building? How does civil society play a role in planning, implementing and monitoring an exit plan or exit strategy?
- Since civil society groups maintain a strong presence on the ground, how can the Security Council tap them to provide early warning signals for lapses in post-conflict peace-building efforts, including relief and humanitarian assistance?
- How can civil society groups serve as an effective and efficient bridge between the local government/people and the international community (donor countries and institutions) to ensure coherence (i.e., ownership, relevance to people) of policies in post-conflict situations?
- How can the Security Council and civil society organizations enhance their respective roles in post-conflict peace-building activities? How can civil society groups complement the work of Governments in post-conflict peace-building? How will the Council ensure synergy between and among the various civil society groups on the ground participating in post-conflict peace-building?
- In a multidimensional and comprehensive approach to post-conflict peace-building efforts, how can the Security Council harness the participation of other members of civil society, such as the religious sector?